

# Waltham Forest Early Years Guidance

This guidance will help you to consider how to make the most of block play to support 2-year-olds learning and development in your early years provision.

Children of all ages love blocks, they are considered the staple of any early years setting. As well as being great fun, construction and block play offers huge potential to support a young child's development.

No matter the size of the environment, every setting should have an enticing space dedicated to block play.

***Did you know that cooperative construction play helps 2-year-olds improve social skills?***

## Why?

Research suggests that very young children develop better language skills when they engage in regular block play both in the home and in an early years provision. This is because parents/carers and adults in settings spend more time talking to their 2-year-olds when engaged in block play, which impacts on the language 2-year-olds are exposed to. We know children learn to talk by engaging in plenty of one-to-one conversations with different people. Block play offers potential for conversational exchanges, exposure to positional language – on top, underneath, next to, behind, under, over, inside – questioning, problem solving and story building.

***Studies show that toddlers watch less TV if they regularly play with building blocks.***

When 2-year-olds play with blocks they are developing their fine and gross motor skills, strengthening hand – eye coordination and develop problem solving abilities as they lift, stack, carry and balance blocks.

2-year-olds are always successful in block play as blocks can be put together in a variety of ways. The possibilities are endless. These variations prepare young children to problem solve and think creatively, as well as encouraging perseverance as they try and persist in achieving their goals.

## How?

Watching how a 2-year-old uses blocks can reveal much about their developmental stage.

At this age block play is very much a sensory experience. At first, they are learning about what blocks are and what blocks can do. 2-year-olds will initially spend their time carrying and transporting blocks, throwing, dropping and bashing blocks together. As they do this, they experience the weight, texture, size and different sounds made. Then 2-year-olds move into a new stage of development where they

stack blocks on top of each other and delight in knocking them down again. They will lay blocks in a row on the floor, horizontally and vertically. As 2-year-olds grow older and gain more experience with blocks, they experiment with connecting blocks together, explore how blocks balance and begin to make structures and name the creations they have made.



## The Role of the adult:

- Join 2-year-old's in building and engage in talk – lots of talk, commentary, introduce spatial language (on top, under, behind...) and ask open ended questions but not too many!
- Model different techniques for building. Show how blocks can stack on top of each other, how to make a bridges and tunnels for cars
- Encourage cooperative play by prompting children to pass blocks to each other or when the tower gets knocked down to rebuild it together
- Encourage imagination. Show the children how to construct buildings, castles, airplanes, boats, robots
- Enhance block play by adding props that link to children's interests - small world animals, dinosaurs, trains, cars. Add photos of interesting buildings and constructions from around the world to act as a provocation for the children
- Add heuristic resources and loose parts to encourage investigation and curiosity
- Give enough time for children to become fully immersed in their block play
- Provide opportunities to return to structures at a later point in the session or week

## Top tips on developing effective block play provision:

- Establish a designated block play area that is protected from passing foot traffic both inside and outside that has ample floor space enabling children to build independently.
- Provide resources in accessible trolleys / storage for easy access.



- Clear labelling supports independence and sorting skills. Where possible label with outlines or photos of blocks

- Provide different types of blocks of varying sizes and shapes; Interlocking blocks – Duplo, Lego and Mega Blocks, large construction blocks, waffle blocks, non-interlocking blocks – wooden, plastic, cardboard boxes, foam, arches

- Ensure there are enough blocks to build several large structures

- Store small world resources close by for quick and easy access

- Provide role play costumes/open ended fabrics to develop imaginative play

- Cardboard boxes can be decorated by the children before hand

- Translucent coloured blocks to develop sensory play on the light box. You can create a simple light box by using a clear plastic box with a lid and battery operated fairy lights placed inside.

## Reflection: How engaging is your block play area?

Take time to stand back and watch children in your provision. Are they engaging with block play? What other resources could be provided? Do you have loose parts in your block play area to support children's constructions?

Regularly monitor the block play provision both inside and outdoors to ensure all children can be independent, challenged, imaginative, experiment, collaborate in their play and develop language skills.

## Reflective Practice Through a Lens

You may find it useful to film children in the block play area, consider the following questions:

- What did you notice about how the children are using area?
- What worked well? How and why did it work?
- Do 2-year-olds move quickly from the area or do they stay and immerse themselves for lengths of time?
- What is the behaviour like?
- What didn't work and why? How could it have been improved?

Can 2-year-olds freely access a variety of blocks and resources without asking an adult for help?	
Are resources open ended, stimulating and supportive of block play and exploration?	
Is the block play area provision inside different from the outside provision?	
Do adults engage in block play alongside 2-year-olds, feeding language, modelling new skills and different ways to use blocks and the resources?	
What is working well?	
What needs developing?	

What resources do I need/could be donated by parents or found in nature?

Are there any training needs?

***Regular block play and construction has been linked to higher mathematical achievement as children grow older.***

### Further Information:

- [7 Stages of Block Play](#)
- [Block play – The benefits of Manipulative Play in Early Years](#)
- [Early Excellence Unlocking the Power and Potential of Block Play](#)

